

006A

CONFRONT 10-26

DAY LD

BY KIM WILLENSON

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- FOR 20 DAYS THE UNITED STATES AND SOVIET UNION BOTH APPARENTLY SOUGHT TO AVOID A DIRECT CONFRONTATION OF THE NUCLEAR SUPERPOWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THEN, FOR A DAY, THEY WERE EYE TO EYE.

THE FULL STORY OF WHAT LED TO THIS--JUST WHAT THE SOVIETS DID, WHAT THEY PRIVATELY SAID AND THE FULL DETAILS OF U.S. DECISION-MAKING--HAS NOT BEEN REVEALED. SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY A. KISSINGER THURSDAY HELD BACK MANY DETAILS.

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE CONFRONTATION WAS PLAIN.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MET IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, AND A PRESIDENT BESET WITH DOMESTIC TROUBLES BEYOND COMPARE ACTED ON ITS RECOMMENDATION AND ORDERED A GENERAL U.S. MILITARY ALERT.

THE BIG NUCLEAR BOMBERS OF THE STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND WERE PUT IN A HEIGHTENED STATE OF READINESS. AIR DEFENSE UNITS WERE SUMMONED TO DUTY. FROM FT. BRAGG, N.C., TO THE PLAINS OF CENTRAL GERMANY, THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN INFANTRYMEN WERE WARNED THEY MIGHT FACE IMMINENT COMBAT IN THE DESERT.

THE CRISIS DEMONSTRATED THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BATTLEFIELD AND DIPLOMACY.

HERE, AS FAR AS CAN BE RECONSTRUCTED AT THIS POINT IS WHAT HAPPENED:

IT BEGAN AT 6 A.M. OCT. 6, WHEN THE TELEPHONE RANG IN KISSINGER'S 35TH FLOOR SUITE AT THE WALDORE ASTORIA HOTEL IN NEW YORK.

THE NEWS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE SURPRISING. KISSINGER, WHO HAD MET ON THE PRECEDING TWO DAYS WITH BOTH EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMMED EL-ZAYYAT AND HIS ISRAELI COUNTERPART, ABBA EBAN, AND HAD NOT HAD THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF IMPENDING CONFLICT, WAS INFORMED THAT HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST BETWEEN ARABS AND ISRAELIS WERE IMMINENT.

HIS FIRST REACTION WAS TO CALL PRESIDENT NIXON IN KEY BISCAYNE, FLA. AFTER A BRIEF, 6:30 A.M. CONFERENCE THE TWO MEN AGREED THAT KISSINGER'S FIRST EFFORT SHOULD BE TO TRY TO HEAD OFF THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR.

OVER THE NEXT THREE HOURS, KISSINGER CALLED EBAN, ZAYYAT, U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM, SOVIET AMBASSADOR ANATOLY DOBRYNIN, CHINESE DELEGATION CHIEF HUANG CHEN, AND SECURITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT SIR LAWRENCE MCINTYRE. HE ALSO CABLED KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN AND KING FAISAL OF SAUDI ARABIA.

NOWHERE, HOWEVER, COULD HE FIND A LEVER POWERFUL ENOUGH TO STALL OFF THE OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING. BY 9 A.M. NEW YORK TIME, WITH EGYPTIAN TANKS AND TROOPS POURING INTO THE SINAI DESERT OVER A DOZEN PONTOON BRIDGES HASTILY STRUNG ACROSS THE SUEZ CANAL, AND SYRIAN ARMOR PUNCHING INTO THE GOLAN HEIGHTS, THE DIE WAS CAST.

WITH THE ARMIES IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED ON ALL SIDES, THE UNITED STATES HAD LITTLE CHOICE OVER THE NEXT SEVEN DAYS BUT TO WAIT UNTIL THE MILITARY SITUATION BEGAN TO RESOLVE ITSELF--AND IN THE MEANTIME TO DO ALL IT COULD TO AVOID GETTING EITHER ITSELF OR THE RUSSIANS DIRECTLY INVOLVED.

ASKED FOR A U.S. ACTION GROUP OF SECOND...  
WASHINGTON...  
DIPLOMATIC...  
AND WALDHEIM. THE UNITED STATES...  
RESUPPLYING THE ISRAELIS, ALTHOUGH WORD OF A RUSSIAN...  
BECAME PUBLIC.

PERHAPS THE MOST ENCOURAGING RESULT OF THE EARLY U.S. INITIATIVES WAS A PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM THE SOVIETS ON OCT. 3 THAT THEY SHARED A DESIRE TO LIMIT THE CONFLICT. NEVERTHELESS, THE RUSSIANS WALKED OUT OF A SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING THE NEXT DAY TO PROTEST AN ISRAELI AIR STRIKE THAT RUINED THE SOVIET CULTURAL CENTER IN DAMASCUS, AND ON THE 12TH THEY THREATENED SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES WHEN THE ISRAELIS SANK ONE OF THEIR SHIPS IN A SYRIAN HARBOR. SOMEWHAT MORE OMINOUSLY, THEY STEPPED UP THEIR AIRLIFT DESPITE A STATEMENT FROM KISSINGER THAT THE RESUPPLY EFFORT COULD "PUT A NEW FACE ON" THE CONFLICT. AS LATE AS THE 12TH KISSINGER MAINTAINED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE COOPERATING TO PREVENT ESCALATION. HE DECLINED TO JUDGE THEM "IRRESPONSIBLE."

AT LEAST PART OF THE REASON FOR KISSINGER'S PUBLIC CORDIALITY WAS THE FACT THAT HE WAS TRYING BEHIND THE SCENES FOR AGREEMENT ON A SECURITY COUNCIL CEASE-FIRE RESOLUTION. THAT EFFORT FAILED ON OCT. 1 "FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS INCLUDING, PERHAPS, A MISASSESSMENT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION BY SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS," KISSINGER SAID THURSDAY.

IN PLAIN LANGUAGE WHAT KISSINGER MEANT WAS THAT THE ARABS, EUPHORIC OVER THEIR EARLY VICTORIES, DID NOT FORESEE THE PUNISHMENT THEY WERE ABOUT TO RECEIVE AT THE ISRAELIS' HANDS. THEIR NEW SAMs AND SAM-7 MISSILES HAD HELPED SHOOT DOWN PERHAPS A QUARTER OF THE ISRAELI AIR FORCE AND HAD DENIED ISRAELI GROUND TROOP THE ABSOLUTE AIR SUPERIORITY THEY ENJOYED IN THE 1967 WAR.

MORE

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